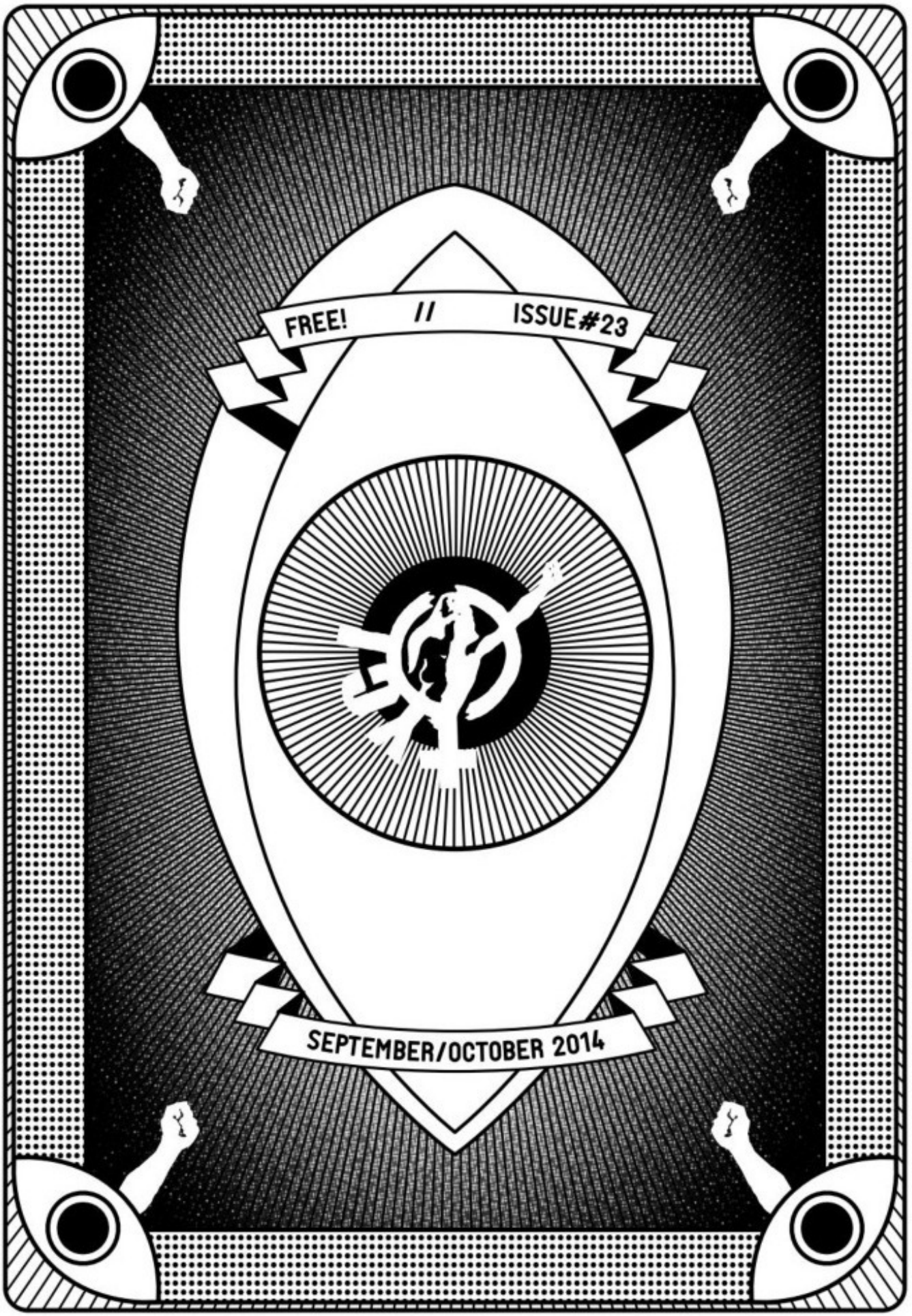
FREE! // ISSUE#23
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STORIES CLOSER TO WHAT WE KNOW

New TYCI contributor Oriana Franceschi writes about why Hollywood needs to stop being afraid of abortion.

It's a funny thing, abortion. Not as an act itself, of course, but it's funny that, as a subject, abortion can strike fear into the hearts of hardened Hollywood filmmakers: filmmakers who don't so much as flinch at the thought of showing us anything from acts of terrorism, to asteroids hitting the Earth, to the rapes and murders of living, breathing, out-of-womb humans.

The subject of abortion is a funny enough thing to be included in romantic comedy Obvious Child, which was released in the UK earlier this month. The film stars Jenny Slate (who you might recognise from Parks and Recreation) as a twenty-eight-year-old New York stand-up who gets dumped, loses her job, has a drunken one night stand, gets an abortion, meets a nice guy, The End. Her life goes on: in fact, it even gets better.

Obvious Child's writer and director Gillian Robespierre was compelled to make the film by "limited representations of young women's experience with pregnancy… We were waiting to see a more honest film, or at least, a story that was closer to many of the stories we knew" (my emphasis). And they weren't the only ones: the film reached an exceeded its $35,000 goal on Kickstarter, more than enough money to achieve its aim: to premiere at Sundance this year.

So, it would seem there's a demand for films that portray abortion in a realistic way. But so far, Hollywood can't quite handle the controversy of portraying women who have abortions and (gasp!) continue to lead happy, run-of-the-mill lives.

Generally, abortion storylines in big-budget American films

and TV have gone one of a few standard ways: a character's abortion took place long in the past but still haunts her; it is almost carried out but decided against at the last moment; a conveniently-timed miscarriage relieves the character of her agency, or it turns out to have been a false alarm all along; a woman who does have an abortion is punished by going through a life-altering, harrowing ordeal in the process…

Both Juno, whose teenage central character does the ol' walk-into-the-abortion-clinic-think-about-a-feotus-with-fingernails-walk-back-out, and Knocked Up - in which Katherine Heigl jeopardises her career by having a baby without considering abortion, even though she barely knows or likes the father - have been appropriated by the so-called 'pro-life' movement as a testament to the right of life.

Neither of these films are necessarily anti-choice or anti-feminist - after all, their characters have every right to decide what to do with the contents of their own uterus- but they do illustrate a trend in Hollywood films to make seeing an inconvenient pregnancy through the only viable option for a "good" central character.

This has been illustrated to a more disturbing degree in the Twilight series. In Breaking Dawn Part 1, Bella insists on continuing a pregnancy that is quite literally killing her (spines snap, knee caps crack, Kristen Stewart gets even thinner, for crying out loud), and makes a series of little pro-life campaign-esque speeches. It's all a kind of echo of Polanski's Rosemary's Baby except that instead of giving birth to the Devil she has Robert Pattinson's baby and calls it Renesmee, which might be worse.

So why is it a problem if teenage girls watch 18-year-old Bella wasting away and eventually being torn open to give birth to her dreamy vampire husband's baby? Because every year 750, 000 American girls between 15 and 19 become pregnant, while the UK has the highest teen pregnancy rate in Western Europe: these young women need to know their options, and they need to not be ashamed of them.

This has been a mixed year for abortion legislation in the US Some states have made improvements, like California, but more states, like North Dakota and Texas, have made abortions much more difficult to obtain. Closer to home, Ireland recently forced a teenage, suicidal rape victim into having a caesarean at just twenty-five weeks pregnant rather than granting the abortion she requested when she was seven weeks into her pregnancy.

Why does the American film industry contribute to this stigmatisation? Despite what it may think, the American public is, by and large, ready to see abortions portrayed in a non-demonising way. For the first time in the forty years after Roe v. Wade, the majority of Americans (54%) are of the opinion that, in

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all or most cases, abortion should be legal.

Even if Hollywood isn't rolling with the times, its stars are. Mark Ruffalo sent a speech to be read at an abortion rights rally in Mississippi in August of last year year, in which he expressed frustration at mounting legislation intended to close every remaining women's health centre in the state that provides abortion services. He spoke of his mother's abortion at a young age, and radically suggested that women might be able to make decisions for themselves without having strange men writing bills to make them instead, "I actually trust the women I know. I trust them with their choices, I trust them with their bodies, and I trust them with their children."

As Joss Whedon's widely-viewed Equality Now Acceptance Speech, and Patrick Stewart's involvement in combating domestic violence with Amnesty International prove, sometimes (as Stewart puts it) "people won't take you seriously unless you're an old [or famous] white man".

There have also been a number of mass-celebrity petitions and campaigns over the past couple of years. They're kind of like Live 8 except nobody sings, and they are much more controversial because they make outlandish claims such as those that women aren't actually farm animals, and just telling them to keep their legs shut might not be the key to reproductive health.

The last couple of years have seen two of these: first came the A Is For campaign, which utilised social media to advocate for women's reproductive rights groups, using videos with celebrities like Martha Plimpton to reach the public's common sense via their funny bone. Later the Centre for Reproductive Rights launched an initiative called Draw The Line, in which celebrities including Meryl Streep, Kevin Bacon, Amy Poehler, Lisa Kudrow and Sarah Silverman urged viewers to sign a petition that stated, amongst other things, that ready access to "safe, affordable reproductive health care- including… abortion" is "a fundamental human right that no government may deny".

Alas, what American actors get up to when they're not on the big screen will never reach as many people as what their characters do on it. Obvious Child is a big step for those of us in possession of a womb (and, incidentally, a sense of humour), and we need more films like this making their way off the art cinema circuit and into the worldwide, big-draw multiplexes.

It's time for Hollywood to follow the lead of its audience, its stars, and its president and make honest films about abortion. 'Torture porn' is an acceptable genre now - what's so scary about one entitled 'Stories Closer to What We Know'?

THIS IS AN EXCERPT. TO READ THE FULL ARTICLE, VISIT TYCI.ORG.UK. OBVIOUS CHILD IS ON GENERAL RELEASE NOW.

SWEET 16 SATURDAYS

Halina Rifai writes the latest entry in our nostalgic series from the ladies behind TYCI.

Dear Sweet Sixteen,

Firstly, you are still overweight. I realise this may come as a disappointment given the amount of time that has passed, but things are starting to get better and you will love yourself more than you have ever done before.

To soften the blow, I want to tell you that you will find the boy you were always looking for. He will hug all your problems away, he will understand every bad thing you have done, he will love everything about you no matter the flaws you feel you have and he will love you more than you can ever imagine, not to mention that he is in a band…

Music will save your life. This is the most important lesson to remember and something that you need to keep with you. It will open doors for you, it will help you make your best friends and it will make your life the richest it will ever be…

Your heart will be broken a couple of times, but you realise that they were not really breaks and just a couple of bad bruises.

Try not to get so angry with people. I know it is tough now with the divorce, but please try to think before you speak. Keep that fire in your belly, but never hate. Be proud always of your culture. I know you can get embarrassed about the funny accent your dad has and the way he haggles for bread in the supermarket, but these are the things that will make you laugh when you get older. The world is going to get a bit more ugly and you need to remember how proud you are to be made up of different countries. There is something happening in Gaza right now that I don't want to scare you with. It will make you appreciate the peace that is happening in Morocco now and how full of life and colour it is…

Finally, keep those opinions strong. Continue to say what you think and don't bow down to anyone. You are fierce, passionate and intelligent. It is what is the making of you.

THIS IS AN EXCERPT. TO READ THE FULL ARTICLE AND MORE IN TYCI'S SWEET SIXTEEN SATURDAYS SERIES, VISIT TYCI.ORG.UK.

Lauren Mayberry speaks to the London post-punk two-piece ahead of their gig for TYCI next month.

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Lyrically, what are you inspired by?

Ros Furieuse (guitar / vocals): The world we are living in, the things which affect us or move us, make us want to sing. Deux Furieuses started as a new project to best put across the songs I was writing after time out for an operation and a very difficult period. I was finding strength from inspirational people around the world. Pussy Riot in their glass cage arguing against the state with brave logic at their trial inspired the song Sometimes Everything Changes and I think woke up a lot of jaded artists in the West.

What is the relation between the song Can We Talk About This and Theo Van Gogh? Why was that something you chose to write about?

Ros: "Can we talk about this?" were the last words of Theo Van Gogh to his Muslim fundamentalist killers in 2004… In 2012, DV8 put on a performance called Can We Talk About This? at The National Theatre which I saw. When asked to 'Put up your hand if you think you are morally superior to the Taliban' hardly anyone felt able to. I had already read Ayaan Hirsi Ali's powerful books and felt as a feminist that the rights of women and children, from whatever cultural background, to not be abused or violated trumped any issues of cultural or religious sensitivity.

What was it like working with Rob Ellis to record Can We Talk About This?

Ros: Nervewracking to begin with but he was very down to earth and made us feel relaxed. He pushed us musically in a way no one has before and it was an honour to hear the thoughts of someone who has worked on all that wonderful music with PJ Harvey. Standing next to Rob singing backing vocals together and Vas doing percussion with him were our favourite moments.

Vas Furieuse (drums / vocals): I showed Rob my drum part for Can We Talk About This? and he showed me the part for Hair from the PJ album Dry.

THIS IS AN EXCERPT. TO READ THE FULL ARTICLE, VISIT TYCI.ORG.UK. DEUX FURIEUSES PLAY TYCI'S SCOTTISH MENTAL HEALTH ARTS AND FILM FESTIVAL EVENT IN BLOC ON 18 OCTOBER. FOR MORE ON THE BAND, VISIT DEUXFURIEUSES.COM.

INTERVIEW: ROS MURRAY

Heather O'Donnell interviews the Trash Kit / Electrelane musician about her experiences as a woman in music.

Who are your personal musical influences?

My favourite band ever is the Raincoats. Beat Happening and K records were a big influence when I was growing up, and all the bands on Slampt records, and Kill Rock Stars.

What have you learned or gained personally from your time in progressive musical projects like Electrelane and Trash Kit?

Music is such a great way of communicating. I feel like really were just talking to each other, and being in bands is just about getting close to people without actually having to think of something to say.

What are the key differences in the way you approach being in each of those bands? How does it differ day to day?

The two bands are completely different. Electrelane does everything in a very professional way, so we all turn up on time for practice, when we practice we practice for several hours. It's all much more serious - bigger venues, we have agents, a sound engineer, a manager and tour manager. Everything is very well organised. We have to plan what we're doing at least six months in advance, if not more, partly because we all live in different countries. With Trash Kit, I hardly know what I'm doing next week…

Where do you think the biggest challenge lies with addressing the gender balance in the overly male-dominated indie / punk scenes?

I don't think it's just the indie / punk scene - it happens everywhere. For me, the issue is about how you're supposed to play, not necessarily just gender, although these things are of course related. It's no secret that patriarchy teaches us that men are the real experts and women can't make good art. I've actually come across men in bands who genuinely say things like 'girls can't rock'. I'm not sure I really want to be able to 'rock', in the same way that I'm not interested in having a picture of a woman on a bank note. I think feminism isn't about women getting into positions of power. It's about challenging those power structures…

THIS IS AN EXCERPT. TO READ THE FULL ARTICLE, VISIT TYCI.ORG.UK. FOR MORE ON TRASH KIT, HEAD TO FACEBOOK.COM/PAGES/TRASH-KIT. FOR MORE ON ELECTRELANE, VISIT ELECTRELANE.COM.

SEEP II: Mirrors and Mires

Cachín Cachán Cachunga! (CCC!) makes its return with SEEP II Mirrors & Mires, an exhibition encompassing photography, performance and film. Catriona Reilly speaks to curator Sandra Alland about the event.

CCC! has been running for five years. Can you tell us about why you started it?

Five and a half years ago, there just wasn't much happening in Scotland in terms of queer and trans* art and performance - especially for migrants, people of colour, and disabled, deaf and/or working-class people. Finding ourselves in a wee bit of a cultural vacuum, and feeling unwelcome in many gay and lesbian spaces, we decided to make our own scene and hope for people to show up. Lucky for us, plenty of excellent people did, so we started a night of dance, literature, film, music and interdisciplinary performance.

What are the best bits of SEEP II?

Highlights include the beginnings of INTER*ME, internationally-acclaimed Del LaGrace Volcano's striking new self-portraiture series reflecting on 'life, death and the aging hermaphroditic body'. Canada's renowned mixed-media and video artist, Karen Miranda Augustine, offers video and new work from Painted Love: Requiems for Salacious Sex Queens, a series on deceased female sex industry workers.

Edinburgh's Tiu Makkonen, an up-and-coming photographer, has created a community portrait of more than 30 people - that gallery-goes will have to physically step on in order to access other parts of the gallery. Glasgow's Steadfast will return with more daring and interactive sculpture, figuratively and literally asking what it's like to be up our own asses.

What do you hope for from the event in terms of education, discussion and inspiration for new work?

Overall, SEEP II will hopefully jump-start many a conversation about community, narcissism, love, artistic practice, intersectional identities and brushstrokes.

The backbone of CCC! is diversity. Why are so many other events lacking in diversity?

I suppose it's because many events, especially those with official funding and those that get attention, are organised by people with power and privilege. And generally privileged people fund and programme other privileged people. The arts are as much of a boys' club, or part of capitalism, as anything.

Queer and Trans* representation is getting progressively better but it's slow progress. What do you think needs to change?

I'm not sure anything is getting progressively better. I think in some ways things were better 10 years ago than they are now. It really depends who you are and where you are, and what you think of as better and as progress.
There's a huge focus on gay marriage being some sort of measuring stick of human rights, but what about the mental health issues in our communities, violence, homelessness, poverty?
These things are getting progressively worse. Rights and assistance for disabled people and (certain) migrants are disappearing by the minute.

One could look at queer and trans* representation as improving in the UK, but I think that would be representation of non-disabled, white, middle-class LGBTQI people. And really, that translates to mostly just gay and lesbian people - let's be honest, the B and the T and anything else are still mostly ignored.

I think we need a return to more grassroots activism. It's not exactly like some of us ever left it, but I think it's generally catastrophic when the government and corporations get super-involved in things like the arts, or deciding what the priorities of a community should be.

For example, an increasing problem with highly-funded LGBT organisations is that they begin to mimic the power structures they were originally trying to criticise. For example, they're mostly run by white middle-class non-disabled cis men. Everyone is desperate for money these days, but you can mostly only get money if you behave properly, do things a certain way. Accept sponsorship from the Olympics or the Commonwealth Games, or fucking ATOS.

It's very difficult to make change from inside this shitty structure, especially when you have few tools. I don't really have any answers, except to suggest we keep imagining alternatives, even if much of the time we're too broke and broken to make them happen.

THIS IS AN EXCERPT. TO READ THE FULL ARTICLE, VISIT TYCI.ORG.UK. SEEP II RUNS FROM 19 -29 SEPTEMBER AT THE PATRIOTHALL GALLERY IN STOCKBRIDGE, EDINBURGH. FOR MORE INFORMATION, HEAD TO BLISSFULTIMES.CA.

INTERVIEW:

EMMA DAMAN THOMAS

Stacey Walton speaks to Islet drummer about juggling pregnancy and live music.

I've been to-ing and fro-ing about taking about my pregnancy publicly as Mark (my husband and bandmate) and I are pretty private. But I've spent so long googling 'pregnant drummer' and poring over any examples I could find from other women about how they did it without losing their mind that I thought the least I could do is talk about my experiences that might help someone else feel confident about their pregnancy somewhere down the line.

This is my first child and it's the first time I've ever had to experience being different from the guys in the band because of my gender… I'm aware of how much scrutiny women's bodies are under, especially on stage or when being photographed. I have felt a little more self conscious than usual, particularly in that stage where you look like you've just had a few extra pies. To fit the music industry standards of beauty you've got to be young, slim, available and fertile-looking but not enough to actually remind anyone of the visceral reality of fertility. But I think it's totally rock 'n' roll to be a pregnant woman in a band!

I hate the idea that making music is only for teenaged boys with guitars or that motherhood is incompatible with creative ambition. We live in a world where Kim Kardashian recommended pregnant women "hide for a good year and having no pregnancy style." There's no way I'm hiding… As yet I don't look hugely pregnant, but anyone who finds my body unsightly can seriously do one. My icon is MIA because she totally rocked a 'like it or lump it' unstoppable pregnant look. And Bjork forming The Sugarcubes on the day she gave birth to her first child.

THIS IS AN EXCERPT. TO READ THE FULL ARTICLE, VISIT TYCI.ORG.UK. FOR MORE ON EMMA'S WORK, HEAD TO ISLETISLET.COM.

You Belong To Me

An opinion piece on agency, body image and respect by TYCI's Sophie Kromholz.

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(Pop)music is rife with comments decreeing value via visuals and slick lines. Attractive women are desirable, and to push it further, functional women. Your looks are what you have to offer. If you aren't attractive, you are failing that function. If you are, you can furthermore be used for further amusement. You are a prop and a tool for others.

At a recent TYCI party, three burly men tried to make their way to the gig. I was standing at the door with a couple of the other ladies, where I caught the eye of one of the guys. He walked over and made some comment about how I look. It wasn't so much a compliment as an appraisal of a piece of meat. After which the guy told me to take my top off. Instead of obliging (really, does that ever happen?), I told the guy calmly, but firmly, that this wasn't an appropriate way to talk to anyone, but especially misguided given the night. He tried to shrug it off. We booted him out and the bouncers escorted him into the cold night.

I was surprised at how bad it made me feel. He was drunk and foolish, but I carried that comment and its implications about me well into the night..

In recent training at a new teaching job it came up again. A colleague had a male student the previous term who felt it was acceptable to loudly talk to his classmates about her posterior. This was a college kid - but also an adult, allowed to drink, drive, and perhaps most concerning, vote. Shortly after training one of my male superiors made a comment, seemingly innocuous enough, about another female colleague and me. It was meant as a compliment, but it was inappropriate and I gave a dry sly response that made it clear how unwelcome and unacceptable his observation was…

The thing is, yes, I have a body, but that body is a vessel which does not serve or belong to anyone but me. I am not ok with being treated like just a body, not for someone's cheap laughs, or their misplaced sense of chivalry. This does not make me an angry feminist, this makes me a person that is outraged by a system which permits and encourages outrageous behaviour - permeating and flirting with the notion that women are just bodies, bodies which are public property and negating the idea that women are people and equals.

THIS IS AN EXCERPT. TO READ THE FULL ARTICLE, VISIT TYCI.ORG.UK.

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SCOTTISH MENTAL HEALTH ARTS & FILM FESTIVAL

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The latest episode of the TYCI podcast is online now and can be found at soundcloud.com/tyciblog. Our next Subcity show will be Thursday 9 October, 5 - 7pm. Tune in at subcity.org/shows/tyci.

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TYCI is a collective run by women.

We have a website where we write about things which affect us and put together features on art, theatre, music, film, politics, current affairs and most things in between. We also talk about similar stuff on our monthly podcasts and radio show on Subcity.

This zine is a collection of some of the content from our site and is distributed in conjunction with our monthly live events.

If you would like to get involved, reply to any of our articles or just generally say hi, hit us up on contact.tyci@gmail.com or visit tyci.org.uk.

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